

Introduction:

The Neighborhood Justice Center is of immense value to the underserved population, especially since it ushered into neighborhoods problem solving strategies that enabled disadvantaged residents to address and resolve many of their disputes, before these erupted into open confrontation that threatened the already tenuous balance in community relations. It is therefore truly sad that plans are underway to disband the Center. Given its usefulness, and its potential for becoming an integral component of underrepresented neighborhoods, we at the Florida A & M University respectfully request that we be given the opportunity to operate the Center at its current location and with all budgetary considerations.

Why Florida A & M University:

For over a century, Florida A & M University has served as the catalyst in the education and training of the underserved and disadvantaged populations. Its knowledge of the plight of the disadvantaged is unparalleled, and its role of uplifting low socio-economic sectors of our population is recognized nationally and internationally. Here, at home in Leon County, FAMU's efforts to bring much needed services into low-income and dislocated communities are common knowledge. Two of the areas in which the institution has provided much needed services is that of mentoring, and assistance to parents and juveniles in crisis. Since 1995, over two thousand FAMU students have served as role models and mentors to at-risk youth within the surrounding communities and schools. Students and faculty have also provided much needed guidance and assistance to juveniles and their parents/guardians.

Overview of the Juvenile Justice Role Model Development and the Parents and Juveniles in Crisis Programs (JJRMDP & POJIC)

The oft quoted statement: *It takes a village to raise the child*, is becoming an idle fancy especially when there is increasing disharmony among villagers, and many adults and children find themselves at the mercy of an already cluttered justice system, all seeking relief and/or justice for infractions that were once resolved by villagers within the communal context. Today, many of the frequently referred to "villages" are in disarray, leaving children to raise themselves in accordance with the non-normative street culture. Especially within disadvantaged communities, social cohesion and solidarity are viewed as relics of days gone by, primarily since both the adult and youth populations are routinely being marginalized from mainstream society. Caught within this marginalization process, many residents - adults as well as children - have become disaffected. Regularly, these disaffected individuals seek out alternative lifestyles that bring them in direct conflict with societal dictates, with each other, and moreover, the law.

It is out of the above stated realities that the Juvenile Justice Role Model Development Program took shape under the leadership of retired Judge Charles Miner in 1995.

Impetus for the Program is grounded in the conviction that one method of addressing delinquency and crime is to educate and train a sufficient number of culturally diverse role models who understand the critical importance of working with at-risk youth. From inception, the Program began to train students to serve as mentors and role models within the schools and communities. Utilizing an interdisciplinary multicultural approach, the Program educates and trains students to become professional employees in youth prevention, intervention and redirection programs. A series of six core courses are offered. These include:

- Juvenile Delinquency and the Juvenile Justice System
- Social Problems of Youth
- Role Modeling and Mentoring
- Intervention and Treatment Strategies for Youthful Offenders
- Race, Class and Justice; and
- Ethnographic Research

As part of the curriculum, students have the opportunity to intern at detention centers, jails, neighborhood service centers, and second-chance schools throughout the state and nation. To date:

1. Over 2,000 students have served as mentors and role models in Leon County Schools and surrounding communities. Students have mentored at Leon High School, Bell View and Nimms Middle schools, Oak-Ridge, Wesson, Bond, Pine View Elementary and FAMU Developmental Research schools.
2. Approximately 234 students have interned at various agencies, which include: Dozier School for Boys, Tallahassee Marine Institute, the Department of Juvenile Justice, Leon County Juvenile Assessment and Receiving Center, various DJJ district offices and detention centers throughout the State, Disc Village, Capital Youth, PACE Schools for Boys/Girls, Florida Network of Youth and Family Services, etc.
3. Several agencies have sought the Program's assistance, and services of our student mentors. Some of these agencies are: Department of Juvenile Justice, Leon County Schools, Appalachee Mental Health, Gator Human Services, Office of the Public Defender.
4. Several of our graduates have become Deputy U.S., Marshals, and many have found employment with various State agencies, and with police and sheriff departments throughout Florida.

In serving as mentors, role models, interns and employees, many JJRMDP students and alumni have found that a large number of youthful offenders are angry at their parents, and harbor mistrust and resentment for law enforcement and juvenile justice personnel. These students have also found that many parents are alienated from their delinquent children. Frequently, these parents do not understand the judicial process, and are unable to access basic information and assistance when needed. Out of these experiences, the Parents and Juveniles in Crisis (PAJIC) took roots. PAJIC's mission is a set of

interrelated functions. These are to: (1) Reach out to the parents of juveniles, informing them about the consequences of delinquency and what they could do to help alleviate this societal problem. Parents are informed about the successful methods of parenting, how to assess and respond to deviant behaviors, and ways to resolve parent-child conflicts. (2) Educate parents of delinquents about juvenile court protocols, and guide them in seeking out information and assistance on prevention, intervention, rehabilitation and other essential services. (3) Provide a forum for parents of youthful offenders to share their experiences of being involved with the juvenile justice system. (4) Serve as a link between parents, law enforcement and the juvenile justice systems by exploring ways to facilitate communication and information flow that would minimize misperceptions and indifferences among all entities.

While PAJIC has not experienced the same level of success as the JJRMDP, the Program continues to grow with support from President Gainous, Dean Rivers and the new FAMU administration.

The Neighborhood Justice Center: A Proactive Approach:

Given that the JJRMDP and PAJIC have already acquired some foothold within the underserved and disadvantaged neighborhoods, our intent is not to reinvent the wheel; it is to build on the already existing structure and relations of the existing Neighborhood Justice Center, linking these with the JJRMDP and PAJIC. What these Programs bring to the Neighborhood Justice Center are:

- (i) ***Preventive service:*** many FAMU students, faculty and staff mentor at risk-youth, encouraging and guiding them to succeed and turn away from a life of delinquency and crime. In assisting at-risk youth, FAMU's volunteers work closely with parents thereby coordinating efforts that otherwise would be conflictive.
- (ii) ***Follow-up and tracking functions:*** many FAMU students already assist in guiding and assisting delinquents to turn around their lives. With assistance from parents, they track the rehabilitation progress of the young offender, and offer encouragement and support to bring about success. This, in turn, has helped to reduce the rate of recidivism in an already overburdened juvenile justice system.
- (iii) ***Residential presence and access:*** many FAMU students, their parents, relatives and friends already live within or in close proximity to underserved communities. This has enabled them to keep in contact with those they serve. Residential presence is crucial to conflict mediation and community justice for it helps to minimize the mediator's role as an insensitive or culturally biased outsider, and facilitates the monitoring of program results.
- (iv) ***Research and Evaluation:*** as part of its Role Model Program, FAMU educates and trains many of its students to become keen ethnographic observers. Most of the training takes place within the correctional facility and community settings. Information gathered from ethnographic research has

helped to tailor *individualized* services to at-risk youth and juvenile delinquents.

All of the above stated functions and services would be linked to expand and strengthen the NJC's community justice deliberations and dispute resolution efforts.

Complementing the services of JJRMDP and PAJIC, the Neighborhood Justice Center brings to these Programs:

- ❖ a direct link to the judicial system
- ❖ a network of legal, paralegal and other volunteers
- ❖ a network of business partners
- ❖ some practical and proven methods in community justice and dispute resolution, and
- ❖ a focus on the adult population

By linking the three components, the NJC would be able to take a more holistic approach to community justice, expanding and strengthening the services delivered. At the same time the NJC would be able to maintain its unique contribution to the disadvantaged and underserved populations, as well as capitalize on a pool of trained students and faculty in the delivery of much needed services. So as to maintain its independence as a government sponsored entity, the intent is to maintain the NJC governing board's structure as a way to ensure policy compliance, oversight and accountability.

Neighborhood Justice With an Ethnographic Holistic Focus:

Crucial in the dispensation of community justice is the manner in which complaints or referrals are dealt with, and the quality of tracking and follow-up clients receive. Academic scholars, policy makers and criminal justice professionals agree that the manner in which sanctions are meted out, the kinds and methods monitoring undertaken, and the follow-up cases receive, all influence whether latent hostilities would surface and exacerbate indifference and conflict.

Since conventional methods of community justice and conflict mediation tend to treat clients as singularities devoid of a social-communal context, monitoring and follow-up are less likely to occur. With major emphasis customarily placed on the conflict itself - the deviant behavior or wrongdoing - minimal consideration is usually given to the individual as a social being within his/her community and surroundings. As such, treating individuals as nonintegrated social beings decreases the chances of full resolution of the problem. Hence, the FAMU ethnographic model would promote monitoring and follow-up of offender and victim within the community/neighborhood context. The family, church, school and residence, all become laboratories for observing and collecting information on clients.

Complementary to the above is the gathering and analysis of valid information. Proper information is critical to the effective delivery and outcomes of services. Therefore, FAMU graduate students, trained as ethnographers, would collect

information on each case within the lived realities of the individual's communal context. In cases of delinquency, each youthful offender would be linked with trained data collectors who would serve the dual functions of mentors and ethnographic observers. The information collected by ethnographers and mentors would be used to refine and guide the delivery of services.